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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 ANKARA 002314

SIPDIS

NOFORN

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [TU](#) [I2](#) [IR](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: TURKS PREPARING FOR PKK SPRING OFFENSIVE

REF: ANKARA 1484

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para. 17.

Summary

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[1](#)2. (S) The GOT appears to be convinced that the PKK is going to carry out its first "spring offensive" in southeast Turkey since 1999. Press and intel reporting indicate the Turks have moved two commando brigades toward the Iraq border in order to hunt PKK terrorists and deter attacks. MFA and TGS contacts have--to a degree--been forthright in expressing their concern to us about the offensive. Should the Turks take more than minimal casualties, we will again feel strong public and political pressure to address the PKK's continuing presence in northern Iraq, and the issue will again dominate the agenda here when we have other crucial matters to pursue. We recommend Washington address this issue with the ITG, at the very least by urging the new government to resume trilateral talks as soon as possible. End summary.

Spring Offensive on the Way?

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[1](#)3. (S) Until it had declared a unilateral cease fire in 1999, the PKK had traditionally carried out a "spring offensive" in Turkey every year. The PKK revoked the cease fire in June 2004; according to GOT figures about 100 soldiers and civilians and another 100 PKK terrorists were killed last year. We evaluate that the GOT--including the military--believes the PKK is gearing up for a spring offensive in southeast Turkey. It appears that the Turks are taking a proactive approach (with some help from us) and hunting for insurgents, especially in areas along the Iraqi border.

[1](#)4. (S) As the mountain snows melt, it becomes easier for PKK terrorists to infiltrate across the Turkish border and execute attacks. Press and intel reporting indicates that the Turks have moved two commando brigades to the Sirnak and Hakkari provinces close to the Iraqi border. According to these reports, the Turks are concerned that a number of PKK terrorists have infiltrated from Iran and (especially) Iraq to carry out attacks in southeast Turkey. According to press reports, there has been "heavy" fighting in the Cudi Mountains area as the Turkish security forces have sought to find PKK terrorists before they can carry out attacks.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The press is also reporting on a "major" battle with PKK terrorists on April 14 in Siirt province. According to these reports, the fighting involved two brigades and 2,000 local village guards. A Turkish first lieutenant, two Turkish senior sergeants, a village guard, and 21 alleged PKK members were killed. The Turkish forces reportedly destroyed five terrorist shelters and captured 19 Kalashnikov rifles, 1 sniper rifle, 2 Bixi machine guns, 54 hand grenades, over 4,400 rounds of ammunition, 12 anti-personnel mines, 5 anti-tank missiles, 4 KG of C-4, 3 KG of TNT, first aid equipment, documents, 3 tons of foodstuffs, and other materials.

SE Turkey Officials: We're Dealing with Mosquitoes,  
the Swamp is in Northern Iraq

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[1](#)6. (C) Amid press reports of security operations against PKK terrorists in southeastern Turkey, Adana consulate's poloff visited government security officials in Mardin and Sirnak provinces April 13-14. Meetings were cordial, but yielded few details about official views on the magnitude of the PKK threat in the region. The Sirnak Security Director, when queried about what his office is up against, focused instead on the need for action against the PKK in Iraq. "We're dealing with mosquitoes here," he said, "but the swamp is in northern Iraq." He stated that in addition to dealing with the terrorists in the Qandil Mountains, the Makhmour camp should be shut down, too. When poloff pointed out the cooperation that had taken place to date between the U.S. and GOT on combating the PKK, he did acknowledge that he had followed those developments "with great pleasure."

[1](#)7. (C) Sirnak's security director reported 14 PKK attacks in

towns around Sirnak province during the last year and did not seem inclined to accept that only now in spring were attacks getting worse. Sharing a border with Iraq, Sirnak is one of the provinces most seriously affected by PKK terrorism, he said. He claimed that PKK members are crossing back and forth across the border, implying that approximating their numbers in Turkey is futile.

18. (C) Mardin's Security Director, however, estimates 48-50 PKK terrorists are active in Mardin province, and claims numbers increase as one heads east. Despite having an idea about PKK numbers and locations in Mardin, apprehending them is challenging, he said, due to their "guerrilla warfare" tactics. He did expect an uptick in PKK attacks with the arrival of spring.

#### Mountain Operation vs. Mountain Festival

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19. (C) Security officials were at pains to assure us that traveling in the region presented no danger to us and indeed, the atmosphere in Mardin and Sirnak's city centers seemed quite normal on the surface. Occasional signs of increased military activity in the region did manifest themselves, however. For reportedly the first time, armed personnel carriers and security forces were prominently stationed at the turn-off from the main Gaziantep-Urfa road to Halfeti on the left bank of the Euphrates, the home district of Abdullah Ocalan. A security checkpoint between Cizre and Sirnak had appeared since poloff last visited the region several months ago and while departing Sirnak town, we saw a military helicopter overhead. For part of poloff's trip, the police "follow car" we are accustomed to seeing during travel in the provinces was armored.

110. (C) The population is definitely noticing the change in atmosphere, according to contacts in Silopi on the Iraqi border. A UNHCR staffer stationed there told us tension in the area has been growing since March 21, when security operations began. In the past two weeks alone, he said, the press had reported one mine attack and three skirmishes between the PKK and security forces in the Sirnak/Mardin area. "Four incidents in ten days: that is not insignificant," he said. Additionally, he said, pro-PKK Roj TV is full of PKK commanders promising the organization will be active, using primarily ambushes and IEDs. With the start of operations, UNHCR had hoped to monitor the condition of families in the area that had returned voluntarily to Turkey from the Makhmour camp, but last week's planned monitoring trip was canceled as the security situation in the mountains outside of Sirnak continued to decline. (NOTE: Despite the talk of tension and reports of a major security operation on Sirnak's Cudi Mountain, reportedly up to 15,000 people attended a first-ever, DEHAP-organized Cudi Mountain Festival outside of Silopi o/a April 9-10. Contacts stated that it was a peaceful event, with no interference by security forces. END NOTE.)

#### Buyukanit Grabs the Spotlight...

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111. (SBU) Thus far Turkish political and military leaders have not commented much on the record on the spring offensive issue, with one notable exception. Land Forces Commander GEN Yasar Buyukanit (who will likely become CHOD in 2006) told the press in March that the PKK's strength within Turkey had reached the same level as in 1999, when Abdullah Ocalan was captured. Likely seizing on the opportunity to needle the government for failing to persuade the U.S. to take military action against the PKK in northern Iraq, Buyukanit said "Now Iraq is being restructured. Do we have any say? No. Do we have an Iraq policy? No." Both PM Erdogan and FonMin Gul reacted defensively to Buyukanit's comments; they essentially responded that Turkey indeed has an Iraq policy, but gave few specifics. Gul took a formalistic approach, saying that only the CHOD and DCHOD had the right to speak for the Turkish military.

#### ...But Turks Tight-lipped on Plans

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112. (S) While embassy contacts acknowledge to us that a spring offensive concerns them, they are also tight-lipped about specific steps the Turkish military is taking to combat the threat. The Turks are typically unwilling--some have said to the point of paranoia--to discuss with us military activity within Turkish territory. Indeed, the Chief of the Intelligence Department of the TGS J-2, RADM Ergun Mengi, called in the DATT on April 14 to accuse the ARMA of asking "inappropriate" questions at an April 8 discussion with J-2's COL Mohamed Karazdiken. In fact, the ARMA had asked nothing about Turkish troop movements in Turkey, and only asked for the Turks' evaluation of the likelihood of a spring offensive. Karazdiken replied that TGS is concerned about a spring offensive, but also that the PKK's increased activity was a normal occurrence. (COMMENT: We find this statement somewhat at odds with the limited activity last year. END

COMMENT.)

13. (C) On April 11, PolOff and PolMilOff called on Ali Findik of MFA's Intelligence Directorate to discuss the PKK. New to his portfolio (and visibly nervous), Findik gave few specifics except to state his concern that recent discoveries of high explosives in southeast Turkey may indicate that the PKK is planning "unconventional" attacks in Turkey. The targets of such attacks might include tourist centers or even the Straits, but Findik also noted that attacks against European tourists in Turkey would be against the PKK's interests, since it would turn European popular opinion against the Kurdish cause. Findik handed us a GOT non-paper on the PKK (text in para. 18).

14. (S) Both the GOT non-paper and J-2's Karazdiken emphasized the importance of the PKK conference which took place in early April in northern Iraq; they believe the PKK will plan the outlines of its campaign there. We assume normal liaison as well as EUCOM's intelligence fusion cell with the Turks here in Ankara will serve as a useful venue to pass on intelligence we gather from the conference.

Comment: PKK Can Threaten to Our Priorities with Turkey  
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15. (C) We cannot assess the reality of a PKK offensive, but we are convinced that the Turks have concluded that an offensive is underway and, moreover, that it is facilitated and directed out of Iraq. Although most senior Turkish MFA officials and senior military officers have a realistic understanding of why the USG has not taken action so far against PKK elements in northern Iraq, the proliferation of conspiracy theories means many attach other motives to their perception. We often hear allegations that the USG is supporting the PKK, laying the foundations for the creation of an independent Kurdistan, and trying to dismember Turkey.

17. (C) If anti-PKK activity or a spectacular attack results in significant Turkish casualties--and especially if there are terrorist attacks on civilian targets in urban or western Turkey--we should expect an increase in anti-American finger pointing, a further decline in cooperation with the USG, and additional pressure on the U.S. to take direct action against the PKK in northern Iraq, or to let the Turks do so themselves. This would be further accentuated by the increased PKK presence along the Turkish border in northern Iraq.

Action Request: Renew the Trilateral Process, Request  
Action of ITG  
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17. (C) Therefore, once there is an ITG in place, we recommend pressing them to agree quickly to resume trilateral talks on the PKK, and pursuing the following additional items with the ITG and KRG to increase pressure on the PKK:

--Declare the PKK officially a terrorist organization;  
--Declare the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party a PKK front party and close down its offices in Iraqi cities;

--Issue Iraqi arrest warrants for PKK leaders known to be in Iraq (the leaders have already been listed in MNF-I lookouts);

--When ISF manpower levels permit, work with UNHCR and Turkey to secure Makhmour refugee camp and pursue an orderly process for durable solutions, including repatriation;

--Shut off PKK supply lines and secure the Iraqi border in areas where the PKK/Kongra-Gel is present;

--Work with the ITG and KRG to encourage the KDP and the PUK to make statements condemning the PKK and to take steps to limit the movement and resupply of PKK cadres and camps;

--Initiate with Turkey a joint information operation designed to take advantage of the splits within the PKK and to further weaken the organization.

18. (C) Text of MFA paper on the PKK

BEGIN TEXT (Note internal paragraph numbering)

CONFIDENTIAL

SIPDIS

PKK/KONGRA-GEL ACTIVITIES

1. The threat of the PKK/KONGRA-GEL still remains a reality for Turkey. Despite a number of structural changes within the organization, the PKK continues to follow instructions issued by Abdullah Ocalan.

2. To date, the terrorist organization numbers some

5,800-6,000 armed militants. These militants can be divided according to their geographical locations: Iraq (2,900-3,200), Turkey (1,700-1,800), Iran (400), Syria and Lebanon (80-100).

13. Although the organization has transferred some of its militants to the Hakurk, Haftanin and Kunera regions (of Iraq), Qandil Mountain still remains its main base and serves as the headquarters of the organization. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL retains all kinds of infrastructures and logistical support in this part of Iraq.

14. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL is increasing its activities in Iraq: its affiliates, the Democratic Solution Party and the Democratic Construction Party participated in the Iraqi elections. Such participation is important to legitimize the PKK/KONGRA-GEL's position. As the organization is experiencing difficulties in recruiting new members, it has started to recruit new cadres from the Makhmour Camp in Iraq.

15. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL has recently intensified its armed activities. The organization possesses around hundred land-to-air missiles (SA-7B). The organization has stored significant amounts of explosives (C-3, C-4 etc.), of which the Turkish security forces seized 300-400 kilograms in 2004.

16. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL has accumulated an annual sum of 16 million euros over the last 2-3 years. This amount has recently decreased. The main two sources of the organization's revenues are commission (on drug and human trafficking) and extortion. The expenditures of ROJ TV amount to 12 million euros per year. It is thought that recent financial problems may push the organization to resort to organized crime.

17. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL has adopted harsh measures in order to deal with those who have left the organization. As such, the head of the Democratic Unity Party, Kemal Sor, was executed in northern Iraq. Following the departure of his moderate cadres, hardliners such as Murat Karayilan and Cemil Bayik have gained influence within the organization.

18. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL has orchestrated over 200 attacks since it gave up its so-called cease-fire of 1 June 2004. In this period, the number of attacks increased two or threefold in comparison with figures predating 1 June 2004. The organization chooses mainly economic targets. There has been an increase of 120% in the number of armed attacks. The organization has started to use remote controlled bombs, especially with the aim of hindering the transfer of security forces in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia.

19. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL is holding its third congress (general assembly) in early April in Kunera of the Mt. Qandil in northern Iraq. The organization is expected to reach a subsequent decision on increasing its attacks and activities, a proposal which was forwarded during the conference of the HPG (People's Defense Forces). A decision will also be taken on the "Democratic Confederatism Protocol Draft." It is possible that the president of KONGRA-GEL, Zubeyir Aydar, will not participate in the congress.

10. The PKK/KONGRA-GEL's most recent affiliate, "New PKK", held its first congress in the Kunera region of Iraq between 28 March and 4 April 2005. This shows that the terrorist organization not only has the ability to hold congresses freely, but also enjoys the support of certain elements in Iraq.

11. Although the Turkish military authorities have informed the US authorities about the presence and activities of the PKK/KONGRA-GEL in Iraq since September 2002, the US authorities have not taken any steps to counter these activities (sic).

END TEXT

19. (U) Iraq posts minimize considered.  
EDELMAN